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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this outline of a 4-6 weeks unit is to assist pupils (K-2) in adapting to a new or changing environment. Its goals are to: 1) help each student acquire a better self-image and realization of his or her worth as an individual; 2) create an environment that promotes a feeling of personal security for each child, free from anxiety and fear of failure; 3) promote good interpersonal relationships, especially building skills in the areas of cooperation, communication and empathy; and 4) strengthen oral language development, vocabulary as well as verbal skills. Ten behavioral objectives are specified (e.g., "The student will be able to name three things that make him or her feel good."); needed classroom materials are listed (e.g., puppets, mask, costumes); and operational procedures are spelled cut. There are suggestions for teacher behavior, role playing scenarios, and activities to promote communication skills. Also provided are recommended supplementary sources containing similar units, references, and a final note indicating that this unit can be used with special needs children. (Author/MQ)

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# ADAPTING TO A NEW OR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

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The problems faced by an individual in our ever-changing society are no less severe than those affecting the world as a whole. An appreciation for the extent of personal problems that Americans face can be gained from even a superficial review of the alarming divorce rate, increases in major crimes, and the illegal use of drugs (Banks, 1978). The previous coupled with rapid technological advances create problems that ~~definitely~~ tax an individual's ability to cope. Furthermore, recent developments in foreign affairs, along with a rampant inflation adds to an air of uncertainly and tentativeness and to our every move.

The family unit, once viewed as the backbone of the American society, is undergoing such radical changes that we would be hard-pressed to describe, promote or teach about the typical household. Standard textbook descriptions of the mother, father and the two children in the middle class neighborhood cannot be identified as the norm by most of our school-age children.

While children cannot even be remotely expected to deal with the resolutions of problems that loom over the general population, it would be naive on the part of educators to assume that these factors did not affect the way the children

act or react. They simply respond within the framework of their developmental capabilities.

While most educators are keenly aware of the overt behavior often displayed by children that function in a non-settled environment, the passive child is many times overlooked. One teacher shared that as long a the child was quiet, they should be left alone with the rationale that educators should not "open a can of worms." Hopefully, this attitude is not widespread.

In an effort to ever improve the educational opportunities of our children, the importance of self-concept development cannot be minimized. Not only should we be concerned with students displaying overt behavior, but the passive ones as well. The purpose of the forthcoming unit is to assist students in adapting to a new or changing environment.

Goal to the Unit

1. To help students acquire a better self-image and realization of his worth as an individual.
2. Create an environment that promotes a feeling of personal security for each child, free from anxiety and fear of failure.
3. Promote good interpersonal relationships, especially building skills in the area of cooperation, communication and empathy.
4. Strengthen oral language development, vocabulary as well as verbal skills.

## Audience

Kindergarten through grade two.

## Time Required

From four to six weeks (maybe longer or shorter depending on specific classroom needs).

## Objectives

The following objectives are included primarily as check-points for the teacher as well as to establish direction for the learning center development.

1. The student will be able to name three things that make him or her feel good.
2. The student will be able to name three things that make him or her feel sad.
3. The student will be able to name three things that a friend means to him or her.
4. The student will be able to name three things that he or she likes about the classroom.
5. The student will be able to name three things that he or she would like to change in the classroom.
6. The student will be able to name three things liked about the neighborhood.
7. The student will be able to name three things that they do not like about the neighborhood.
8. The student will be able to role play certain events utilizing puppets, masks or costumes in the learning center area.

9. The student will be able to role play certain events utilizing puppets, masks or costumes with one other student.
10. The student will be able to role play certain events utilizing the puppets, mask or costumes with a small group of students.

Materials

1. Puppets depicting animal and/or person, either commercial or teacher-made.
2. Mask, either commercial or teacher-made.
3. Costumes, either commercial or teacher-made or brought by children from home.
4. An area in the classroom designated as one where the materials can be used and stored.

Teacher Suggestions

Throughout these sessions the teacher must be a listener to those who want to share their experiences, a comforter to those who are homesick, a partner to those who need a playmate, and an audience to those who want to perform.

Procedures

1. The first step to take in preparing for this type of learning experience is to isolate one section of the classroom as being reserved for this type of activity. It is important that the decor be different from the rest of

the room, as it will become a "special" place for the students.

2. Following the previous, the teacher should talk to each child for a few minutes to assess apparent strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes and possibly similarities of preference between children. All findings should be recorded in an individual log in an effort to determine personal growth after a period of time. This also provides excellent records for parent-teacher conferences.
3. Explain to the children that the designated are is for role playing utilizing puppets, masks and/or costumes. At this point, the teacher may want to demonstrate how the area can be used by reading a familiar children's story while having the students act out the parts. Further examples of roles that may be used will encourage participation.
4. For the child/children's first experience, the teacher should be an audience and/or actor for those involved. This can provide security for the shy, insecure child. At this point, the listed objectives can be dealt with (refer to previous objectives).
5. Record these experiences in the child's log addressing such items as participation, fears, communication skills, etc.
6. A. Explain to the children that they can pick a friend to utilize the area or if they wish (and you have the time) that you will spend a few minutes with them. Again, record the findings in the child's log.

B. In some cases, the child may wish to go to the area alone. This is also desirable, as a child is functioning in his or her new environment.

7. After several sessions have been conducted in this manner, the teacher can encourage small group participation. This will provide the students with invaluable social interaction and further development of their communication skills. As a safeguard, the teacher may want to monitor the initial encounters. Record any findings as appropriate in the child's log.
8. As a follow-up or culminating activity, talk with the child again to discuss some of the concerns as dictated by the objectives as well as what has been recorded in the individual logs.
9. Record the findings and assess the progress that has been made. This can also provide further insight as to the possible weak areas that need to be dealt with.

Role Playing Suggestions

1. To be playing school.
2. Playing fireman, policeman, lawyer, or other careers.
3. Playing house.
4. Playing favorite person (TV, movie, sports, etc.).

Further Suggestions to Promote Communications Skills

1. Create a model kitchen which utilizes necessary items made from boxes. The children can assist in the painting and/or creation of these appliances.

2. A costume area. The teacher can collect various uniforms, masks, wigs, tools, etc., including adult clothing for role playing use.
3. A puppet area. A puppet stage can be built from boxes and include various hand-, finger- and/or stick-puppets (human or animal) for free time use.
4. A sandbox, which is a versatile substance for creative purposes. Children can build structures, write letters, or do sensory activities in this particular area.
5. The creative arts. At various times throughout the year an art center can be set up for student use, including easel painting, finger- and toe-painting, etc. The ~~teacher can~~ do a few lessons with creative movement. For instance, moving your body in accordance with the mood of music.

Culminating Activity

Procedures 9 and 10 are primarily designed as culminating activities, but other ideas are to have the children role play before the class, a game designed to provide group activity, or any art-related project that is deemed important by the teacher.

Supplementary Information

Ideas for units like this or similar ones can be obtained from such books as:

1. The Other Side of the Report Card by Larry Chase.

2. Humanizing the Classroom by John Miller.
3. Values of Teaching by Rath, Harmond and Simon.
4. Puppets, masks and costumes can be obtained from any variety store, from items children have at home, or those made by the teacher.

References

1. Banks, James. Teaching Strategies for the Social Studies. 2nd Edition. Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1978.
2. Chase, Larry. The Other Side of the Report Card. Goodyear Publishers, 1976.
3. Dunvy, Maxine. Teaching for Social Values. ASCD, 1974.
4. Pfrommer, Susie. Fairview Elementary School Pre-school teacher, Bloomington, Indiana.

Final Note

The identical procedures may be used for any special children you have in the classroom. As mainstreaming becomes an integral part of our educational system, so should activities such as these. Furthermore, the success that children should experience will hopefully make their formal educational years more profitable ones.

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